

Halo: Wasteland

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Summary: SPARTAN Astrid Miles is starting to feel the effects of true loneliness. Despite being trained to be left on an unknown planet for years, Astrid finds it harder and harder to cope with the isolation. Little or no established HALO characters.

1. Chapter 1: A sea of dust

Halo: Wasteland

Chapter I: A sea of dust

* * *

><p>Loneliness. That's what hit me the hardest. A crushing feeling of total isolation that weighted down like a Frigate on my shoulders. I should have expected it. It was my job after all. Trained to be a SPARTAN Rogue, I'm deployed to unknown planets for extended periods for time with no contact with command.</p>

Even so, the solitude will burrow into you and form a heavy lump to carry around day in, day out.

My name is SPARTAN Astrid Miles. I'm a lieutenant in the UNSC. I've fought on Requiem. And despite all that, I'm still stuck here on my own.

I crawled out of my camp, a standard issue Marine tent and a few sandbags. I had a turret before, but that got destroyed in a firefight with a Ghost patrol. Yeah, the Covenant are here, or rather, he scrounging, fledgling bird it is now.

Why the hell they want this planet though is a mystery to me. Unknown Planet #55CX-AD9. That's how it's logged. I've taken to calling it The Old West. The huge expanse of grey/brown rock all around remind me of the Abandoned Mining towns in the American deserts. There's nothing here, all of just dust and stone. A few ragtag pockets of

Covenant resistance here and there but otherwise it's a barren, arid wasteland. But I have possible years of deployment here.

I've already lost track of how long I've been on this dustball, it could be months, years, even decades. The three suns that cycle in tandem ensure that there is never truly a night, and as such the days just blur together into a brown smear on my memory.

I un-holstered my pistol, now weathered and chipped, and swept the camp and surroundings. Nothing near by; nothing on my motion tracker, and nothing I could see with the naked eye. For a moment I felt dejected. A second ago, I had felt a little hope that a Pelican was going to swoop down, and a squad of Marines would take me away from this place. But nothing came, and I was left staring at the sky again, the great blue sea that was tinged wth gold as two suns set and rose simultaneously.

"What's the date Vekta?" I asked. Vekta was my only companion for this trip. A single AI, built specially for this mission. She had become the closest thing I had to a friend.

She flickered to life on a wrist mounted projector that had been installed in my armour, which shrunk her down to several times less than her preferred size. She chose to appear as what looked like a Motocross Rider, a sport that had died at the turn of the 21st century. She was white, tinged with bronze. She had no helmet, so her "hair" was pulled back into a long pony tail that reached the small of her back. She stretched for a moment, and blinked in the ever-present sunlight.

"The date?" she said, cocking her head to one side, "Well, according to the atomic clock it's-"

"You know that's not what I meant," I said softly.

Vekta sighed, and seemed to slump forward slightly. This mission had taken it's toll on me too. If the days were long for me, they would be torturous or a smart AI.

"It's day 389," she said, and I could here the faintly depressed tone in her voice, "We've been here nearly 13 months."

I was shocked, had it really been that long?

"Any word from SATCOM?" I asked, not hoping for an answer, not what I would receive.

Vekta looked at me, and, despite me knowing what was coming, I felt my stomach sink.

"You already know the answer," she said gently.

I nodded, and then snapped the projector off.

"Come on,"I said, "We've got work to do."

There wasn't much to take, a single MA5D assault rifle, painted a pale brown to disguise against the landscape, a few clips of ammunition for both the MA5D and the Pistol, a s mall canteen of water, with I hooked to my waist. I strapped to the assault rifle to

my back, and the pistol to my leg, and then flipped Vekta's projector back on.

"What adventure you got for me today, Vek? ?"

She paced back and forth on the small blue square on my wrist, tapping her chin.

"Head North-East," she said, gesturing at a hill to my left, and a waypoint blinked into life on my HUD, "I'm not reading much on the map that way."

She faded from view, and I looked toward the waypoint, and sighed. Another long day was at hand.

* * *

><p>Yes, it's short, but this is just the introduction, the next chapter will be longer. A word of warning though, this series is not going to be an action packed thrill ride, there are plenty of those, written by better authors than I. No, this will be a more psychological story, focussing mainly on the effect this mission has on Atrid's mind. If that isn't your cup of tea then isn't going to be for you.

_I hope you enjoy this story. _

2. Chapter 2: A horizon never coming

Halo: Wasteland

Chapter II: A horizon never coming

"_How we need another soul to cling to." _

Sylvia Plath

* * *

><p>Nothing, but then I never expected to find much. The camp was already out of site as I trekked through sand dunes that grew deeper and heavier with each step.<p>

"You see anything Vek?"

"Couple of blips, probably indigenous wildlife," she said, not bothering to appear, and just speaking inside my helmet, "A click to the east."

"That it?" I asked, reaching around for the canteen at my hip.

"I think, wait," Vekta said slowly, "Wait a second."

I paused, wondering whether it was worth unlimbering my Assault Rifle.

"What do you see?"

"It more... complex than that," she said, "It's not what _is _there;

it's what _isn't._"

"What?"

I pulled the assault rifle off my back and flicked off the safety.

"Where is it?" I asked, my eyes narrowing.

"Right... here."

A waypoint appeared on my visor, just over the crest of a nearby dune. I made my way up the hill slowly, staying low to the ground, my rifle half-raised.

Nothing, just another plateau of dust and dirt.

"What is this? There's nothing here."

"Look closer," Vekta said, impatience creeping into her voice.

One closer inspection I saw that something was there, a... shimmer, too regular for a heat haze. Active camo? But what for?

I quietly got down and lay prone in the sand, the rifle raised up to my eye.

I lay there, waiting and watching the distortion, not quite knowing what to expect. Then, suddenly, the shield powered down.

It was a sorry sight. It had obviously once been a large Covenant camp, but it now lay desolate and abandoned. Bodies of dead, malnourished Grunts lay scattered on the ground, and I could see shield barriers that flickered on and off, protecting a base of ghosts.

I got up slowly, using one hand to push myself to my feet, the other keeping a firm grip on the MA5D.

"My God," Vekta breathed, as I moved toward the base, picking my way through the bodies strewn everywhere.

It was almost poignant, seeing the loss of life due to the Covenant's abandonment.

"What the hell happened here?" I murmured. The installation was totally silent, and the sickly smell of rotting bodies had made its way through the filters on my helmet.

The door inside slid open with a low beep, and a machinelike hiss. Something moved, and, without thinking, I raised the rifle and snapped off a three round burst. Something crumpled to the ground in front of me, but it didn't bleed. I activated the flash light, and saw it was the body of an Elite Minor. It had been dead long before I got here. Its plasma rifle still looked like it functioned though, and I prised it from the dead thing's fist.

"Interesting," Vekta said curiously.

"What?"

"I thought the Plasma Rifle was out of production, and had been for years. These Covenant have been here for quite some time apparently."

I holstered the Plasma rifle, and checked the ammo count of my MA5D. 29 rounds in the magazine, and only a few spares. I may need the Covenant tech sooner than expected.

Something appeared on the motion tracker, heading straight towards me. The rifle was back at my eye, and I tracked the red blip on my HUD. It staggered round the corner and I lowered the rifle, it wasn't going to be a threat. It was a Grunt, but barely. It was deathly thin, the methane tank on it's back looked like it had been punctured, and then repaired by patching from its dead comrades.

"Do you have it?" It rasped, its hands reaching for me.

"What?" I asked, taking a step backwards. This decrepit thing looked far from rational, and I wasn't about to take any chances.

"Do you have it?" it gasped, and it lunged and grabbed the chest plate of my armour, "The teat, the teat. I need it!"

Slowly, I reached for my pistol and drew it slowly. The Grunt noticed my movement, and its eyes widened and it chattered rapidly in its alien tongue. The muzzle of the gun touched it's forehead, and I looked it straight in the eye.

A single pull of the trigger, and the Grunt collapsed backwards, a rush of foul smelling breath escaping it.

"Good Lord," Vekta said, and I could hear the sickened tone in her voice, "Do you see the crusting around its mouth? I think its been eating the bodies."

"Things must have got pretty desperate here," I muttered, holstering the pistol, and squatting down to examine the recently deceased Grunt. Vekta sprung into life at my wrist, and stepped onto the body that bled into the dust.

"Do you see this?" Vekta asked, inspecting the patchwork methane tank, "It's done repairs to the tank. I didn't know Grunts had that much ingenuity."

"He didn't do a good job though," I remarked drily.

"Quite," Vekta replied, "I'm detecting multiple minute leaks all over the pack; I'm amazed he survived so long."

"As much as this could be called survival," I said, glancing around and the faceless, indifferent terrain all around me.

"Indeed," Vekta agreed, hopping back onto my wrist and disappearing, "Come on, let's check out the rest of the base."

I stood, feeling my knees pop slightly.

"Where am I headed?" I asked, fiddling with the pistol handle.

"Gimme a sec," Vekta said, "Here."

The waypoint led me back to the door where I had found the Elite's body, and then inside. It was typically Covenant, and could have been a corridor in any Covenant structure, or even ship. The walls glowed a faint purple, and the occasional body lay against the wall, or sprawled across the floor like discarded puppets.

I approached the final door, and felt a slight sense of unease bubble in my stomach.

"Get it together Astrid," I hissed, "You're a SPARTAN."

I unslung my Assault Rifle and flicked off the safety, and began to move toward the door slowly, my nerves still unsettled.

The door hissed, and then jerked open in a way that didn't fit with the smooth efficiency that the Covenant normally upheld. The room inside was gloomy, but an abhorrent stench hit me as the two atmospheres made contact. I knew that smell, it was another rotting body.

"I guess we found who's in charge," Vekta said flatly, "Hang on, I'll get the VISR working."

It took a second, and then the scenery was outlined in dull yellow. The room was bigger than I expected, the back wall lined with screens and Covenant computers. There was a single chair in the centre of the room, and the large misshapen form that was slumped in it.

I entered the room warily, and prodded the body with the muzzle of my rifle, even though it was almost certain it was dead. Although, I guess it never hurt to be cautious.

Vekta appeared at my wrist and glided over to the console, whilst I policed the dead Elite's weapons. He had been a Zealot, a highly decorated one. His armour was ornately embellished with spiralling and twisting paths that coursed, vein-like, all across the plates.

"My god," I heard Vekta exhale, and turned to face her. She was watching a fast scrolling page of Covenant symbols, which were reflected on her face. Her eyes were moving just as quickly as the characters on screen, and a mirror image of the symbols was flowing down her back. She was twirling her ponytail around her finger absently, an interestingly human action.

"This is a log of everything that has happened in this base," she explained, eyes still fixated on the information before her.

"They've been here near enough five years," she said breathlessly, her mouth slightly agape.

"They've been here since before Requiem?" I asked, dumbstruck. That idea was unfathomable to me. I'd been here one year, and despised this planet nearly as much as the Covenant, but five years? The idea was tortuous.

"And when Requiem fell, this planet was abandoned," Vekta continued, "All squads were left to fend for themselves. There wasn't any warning."

She shook her head, and, with a wave of her hand, the screen died.

"This base lost contact with the others on this planet about 14 months ago," She said, and I could hear a strange bitterness to her tone, "I can only assume they ended up the same way as this one."

I knew the Covenant were ruthless, but this seemed needlessly so. I understood that sometimes you just can't get everyone out, but to leave a whole planet to rot? Despicable.

"Why's the camo still active?" I asked, "Why are they bothering to shield a base where everyone's dead?"

"It must be running on automatic," Vekta guessed, as she powered down the console, which complied with a low hum.

"C'mon," she said, and I saw her shiver slightly, "Let's get out of here, this place makes me... nervous."

She floated back over to my wrist, and dissipated back into my armour. I left the room, pausing only to pick up the dead Zealot's Carbine. It couldn't do too much harm to have a few spare weapons.

I stepped back out into the light, the VISR flicked off, and my vision darkened as the visor polarised automatically.

The wind had picked up since my time inside, and it howled balefully as it swept across the forgotten landscape. Innumerable sightless eyes stared into the sky, and I could see that small dunes had already begun to form against the corpses.

Despite the silence, the isolation, and the lack of any direct threats, this place felt like the most hostile place I'd ever been.

End
file.